Chapter 14

Gay, famous and working hard on YouTube

Influencers, queer microcelebrity publics and discursive activism

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Introduction

Influencers are everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large public following on blogs and social media, principally through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles. Subsequent to their emergence in the early-2000s, Influencers have progressed from hobbyist home-based webcamming and desktop publishing to extremely lucrative full-time careers. They engage with their followers in digital and physical spaces, and monetise their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blog or social media posts. In the context of monetising their everyday lives and earning a living through digital activity, micro-celebrity Influencers perform a new form of labour commensurate with the digital turn in neo-liberal economies. So viable and attractive are their activities that a new industry has grown up rapidly, with followers intensifying in brand loyalty to their favourites, wannabe Influencers attempting to mimic successful exemplars, and businesses clamouring to tap into the following of these notable icons. Influencers capitalise on their high visibility in digital spaces to propel themselves into other mainstream media industries including television, cinema, music, publishing and fashion.

Many Influencers are also engaging in social justice ecologies, using the 'work' of their lifestyle narratives and platforms to personalise and promote causes pertaining to politics and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) advocacy. These queer Influencers are important nodes in LGBTQ networks online, especially as they have become ambassadors for various queer-related community and corporate services, amplifying crucial health and well-being messages as informal sexuality educators, and continuing to foster a sense of community and loyalty among their young followers. Within a framework of sexual citizenship, the emerging relationship between new forms of labour and new forms of sexuality are unsurprising. Indeed, as Bell and Binnie (2006, p. 869) have pointed out, contemporary citizenship models produce identity within models of both rights and responsibilities, the latter of which is modelled on responsibilities for labour.

While Influencers are now established across social media platforms and old/new media, much of their content is based on the 'vlogging' framework developed

on YouTube in the mid-2000s. Queer Influencers on YouTube, however, operate with distinct cultural repertoires and community vernacular. In instituting and enacting the narrative tropes of queer confessions – such as coming out, struggling with depression or self-harm, the processes of transitioning, confirming a relationship, or announcing a breakup – queer Influencers on YouTube tend to adopt the stance of responsibility, care and advocacy when addressing young followers, especially those they imagine to be closeted, struggling or looking for guidance.

In this chapter, we draw on digital ethnography to produce a content analysis of a gay-identifying Australian YouTube Influencer, Troye Sivan, as an exemplar, focussed on how he used initially his status as an Influencer creating digital content to promote discursive queer support, and how he constituted and utilised queer networks of microcelebrity in a form that simultaneously undertook work for both a rights-based activism and for his career.

Queer networks on YouTube

Every social media platform has a specific repertoire of normative usage and a dominant form of cultural content shaped by the architecture of the platform, key nodes who are often highly prolific and influential users, and the cultural norms of the masses of users. Researchers have studied such normative forms and functions as 'platform vernaculars', or a 'unique combination of styles, grammars, and logics' as a dominant 'genre of communication' (Gibbs et al. 2015, p. 257). Platform vernaculars are co-created through their 'logics of architecture and use' (Gibbs et al. 2015, p. 255), 'mediated practices and communicative habits of users', 'ongoing interactions between platforms and users', and migration across various social media (Gibbs et al. 2015, p. 257). Within each specific social media platform are also various cultures of users, some dominant, some mainstream, and others marginal or underground. Each subculture may practice their own genre of content production and communicative intimacies (Abidin 2015), creating and sustaining specific community 'norms' that emerge from interactive engagement and collaborative participation among users themselves (García-Rapp and Roca-Cuberes 2017).

As the reactions from ordinary viewers, prolific Influencers and YouTube as a corporation evidence, YouTube is undeniably an important space for queer young people to congregate, produce and consume content, look to queer Influencers as role-models and key opinion-makers, develop queer networks that carry across various social media, and foster community beliefs and norms. In this vein, then, YouTube operates as a setting for the performance of particular kinds of sexual citizenship that blur the boundaries between labour, identity, sexuality, rights, justice and consumption.

YouTube Influencers such as Troye Sivan play the role of opinion-maker who can craft discursive networks around themselves as the instigative node. By using a personal voice that is 'engaging and… controversially honest' (Abidin 2017b, p. 502),

queer Influencers may present as 'an authoritative yet approachable identity' (Johnston 2017, p. 76), and treat taboo topics with 'intimacy and insight' through personal disclosure (Abidin 2017b, p. 504). Such narrative strategies, wherein sexual literacies are intricately tied into a 'personal journey' rather than the cold facts of queer support agencies, effectively ride on the Influencers' charisma to engage young audiences (Abidin 2017b, p. 504). Furthermore, many Influencers give in to the allure of 'sex bait' or the 'use of sex talk as bait to increase readership and sustain their readers' accessibility and intimacy to their blog persona' (Abidin 2017b, p. 500), and in so doing they inevitably provide new spaces of conversation around minority gender and sexual literacies.

By voluntarily disclosing highly private, personal and privileged information to their community, such viewers allow their collective vulnerability to constitute a queer public, comprising 'the conjoint pleasure of self-disclosure and sharing' (Cover and Prosser 2013, p. 84) in which young people are encouraged into this safe space to seek 'solidarity, support, and engagement' from others (Green et al. 2015, p. 709) through a 'sense of communitarian responsibility' (Cover and Prosser 2013, p. 84). These comment sections then serve as subcultural spaces in which like-minded queer youth offer support and advice to each other (Abidin 2017b, p. 504), and closeted queer youth learn about an accepting public community for whom these conversations can unfold in a safe space.

Followers are also encouraged to vlog and share personal experiences, using the queer Influencer's narrative or style as a template, thus increasing the volume of content addressing concerns of queer youth and replicating the visibility of queer support through YouTube's algorithmic recommendations and suggested videos. In the same way a 'network of interlinked blog posts on a shared topic' becomes more 'politically significant' than 'the individual blog post' (Shaw 2012, p. 375) in blogging networks; on YouTube the comments section represents the 'aggregation of individual experiences' and thus creates 'a database of experiences' that other queer youth can harness. As such, it is the 'day-to-day interlinkage and exchange' between users in a networked community that make the medium political (Shaw 2012, p. 375), in a practice that Mazanderani et al. (2013, p. 424) term '"people power" advocacy'.

Troye Sivan

The vast majority of queer discursive videos on YouTube today borrow on the legacy of the *It Gets Better* network of videos, focussed on the production and sharing of content that is in the recognisable form of coming out narratives, personal histories, stories of struggle and vulnerability, and eventual acceptance and stability. Pioneers of the *It Gets Better* movement, gay couple Dan Savage and Terry Miller responded to the spate of sexuality-related youth suicide media reports in October 2010 (Cover 2012a) by uploading the first *It Gets Better* video on YouTube in September 2010, recounting their struggles as closeted gay teenagers in school, how they came out to their friends and family, how they were gradually accepted

by a community of friends and family, how they found love in each other, their experiences of coupling and parenting, and the progress of a life that 'got better' (Gal et al. 2016, pp. 1698–1699) after their schooling years. The eventual resolution in this 'social drama' (Turner 1975) was the couple's ability to successfully form a normative family unit through coupling and parenting, and their capacity to successfully participate in adult life through building careers and maintaining a network of friends. As such, participation in the queer publics of coming out on YouTube re-enacts a queer young person's sense of belonging to 'the political, the individual and the social' (Cover and Prosser 2013, p. 84).

In his study of gay and lesbian YouTube celebrities' coming out vlogs, media studies scholar Michael Lovelock argues that coming out vlogs 'make legible a normative gay youth subject position which is shaped by the specific tropes, conventions and commercial rationale of YouTube fame itself' (2017, p. 87), thus institutionalising 'particular scripts of coming out' to the point of becoming 'cliché' (2017, p. 88). Lovelock argues that YouTube celebrity has 'its own regime of entrepreneurialism, self-branding and the commodification of the 'authentic' self' (2017, p. 88). However, equating successful YouTube celebrity to an authentic self (in the singular) seems applicable mostly to the genre of confessional vlogs on YouTube and is an over-generalisation of the diverse ecology of microcelebrity and Internet celebrity genres and formats on YouTube which respond to the complex and competing demands of narrative, labour, content creation, microcelebrity and social justice norms.

Influencers on YouTube base their performance on 'an architecture of "anchor" material and "filler" material' wherein the former is the mainstay of thematic content production and the latter complementary output to foster interactions and intimacies with audiences (Abidin 2017a, p. 4). For instance, YouTubers known for producing excellent music covers (anchor) may occasionally indulge followers in Q&As, giveaways or vlog confessions (filler). Indeed, some YouTubers may peddle entirely in anchor content, choosing to publish only their gameplay (such as VanossGaming), makeup tutorials or humorous skits, to name a few, without crafting a behind-the-scenes or back-end persona to engage with followers (Abidin 2016, 2017a). YouTubers who adopt this strategy are thus evaluated by followers less on any authentic disclosure and more on the excellence and professionalism of their content. However, for queer Influencers, the distinction between anchor and filler content is not so clear, given that the bulk of their content is premised on the narration of their lifestyles and personal lives. Often, branded content is so interwoven into their personal narratives that it becomes difficult to demarcate commercial and non-commercial messages. As such, their social, cultural and economic value is complexly intertwined with their performance of self-disclosure, in which personal flaws, vulnerability and taboo discourses are volunteered in exchange for relatability from viewers.

Troye Sivan is originally from South Africa but lives in Perth, Western Australia, with his family. Born in 1995, he was talent-spotted as a child for having a beautiful singing voice and performed at numerous events. Although like

many Influencers Sivan manages a host of digital estates, this chapter will focus on his two YouTube channels and particularly on a purposive sampling of nine videos on his personal channel to illustrate some key arguments related to the intersection of sexual citizenship and the work of digital content creation.

Sivan began his YouTube channel @TroyeSivan18 at age 12 in 2007 and had produced more than 140 videos by August 2017. A notable turning point in the types and forms of content he produced took place in 2013 when Sivan came out in a milestone vlog as gay. Around the same time, Sivan was talent scouted by music label EMI Australia and introduced a second channel, @TroyeSivanVEVO, managed by the US-based video hosting corporation VEVO, which promotes official music videos and content from Warner Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Universal Music Group. This second channel has produced over 40 videos as of August 2017. Subsequent to conducting digital participant observation and immersion on his channel and since 2011, it is discernible that his digital content at that site can be organised across three categories or types, each of which will be addressed in the following: (1) personal vlogs, in which Sivan addresses his viewers in first-person dialogue format; (2) brand collaborations, in which Sivan shares queer and sexuality-related content sponsored and paid for by clients; and (3) Influencer collaborations, in which Sivan appears alongside other prominent (queer) YouTube Influencers in his content in a bid to share their reach and mutually expand their networks.

Personal vlogs

The most significant personal vlog for this study is Sivan's milestone coming out video titled 'Coming Out', which has accumulated over 7,500,000 views (Sivan 2013). In his preamble, Sivan tells viewers, 'this is probably the most nervous I've ever been in my entire life' and that he came out to his family on this date three years before in 2010. He proceeds to tell viewers,

> and on August 7, 2013, I want *you guys* to know that I am gay. It feels kinda weird to have to announce it like this on the internet, but um I feel like a lot of you guys are like real, genuine friends of mine, and I share everything with the internet, I share every aspect of my life with the internet. And um, whether or not this is a good thing, I don't know, but this is not something that I am ashamed of. It's not something that anyone should have to be ashamed of.
>
> (Sivan 2013)

Here, Sivan adopts a homonormative discourse grounded in essentialist approaches to sexuality that are recognisable to audiences for the purposes of belonging and community citizenship. He describes how he had always felt 'different' when he was younger, how he had intrinsically 'always known' that he was

'different', and shared the revelation of how he first came out to his best friend at age 14-and-a-half. Sivan narrates that he was 'genuinely not ready' to accept himself and, while speculating that he might have been bisexual, turned to his laptop for answers (Sivan 2013). At this juncture, he asserts his impetus and intentions for producing the coming out video:

> The majority of the reason why I'm doing this today is because I hope that people like 14-year-old Troye are going to find this video, because I watched pretty much every coming out video on YouTube […] I watched it between 14-and-the-half and 15, and those coming out videos, and those people on YouTube, those brave brave brave people on YouTube, without them I don't know where I'd be, I don't know, I genuinely don't know what I would have done because um, yeah it just kinda showed me that it's okay. There's people out there living healthy happy lives who are absolutely fine, and they happen to be gay as well.
>
> (Sivan 2013)

Sivan wraps up the video with a message of encouragement to young viewers who may be closeted:

> I'm also here to say that my message is that it can be good right from the start. You know, you could have a completely smooth smooth sail out of the closet. Though this video has probably been the hardest video to make, that I've ever made, I hope that nothing will change. I'm going to leave my email address in the down bar, so you guys can contact me with any questions or queries. And I'm also going to put a whole lot of resources for young gay teens in the description that um, the kind of resources that helped me out when I was a scared little 14-year-old. I love you guys so much. Seriously, I do, I really do.
>
> (Sivan 2013)

The video description points to queer resources, such as links to The Trevor Project, Trevor Space, HRC, Minus18 and GLAAD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, a media monitoring organisation in the United States of America). In this context, the labour of digital content creation is synonymous with both the performance of sexual identity through a recognisable coming out video and community-articulated justice through the provision of advice, support and resources that – potentially – his viewership may not necessarily have sought to access elsewhere.

A second personal vlog of note is titled 'DO I HAVE A BOYFRIEND?' and has accumulated over 4,900,000 views (Sivan 2015a). Sivan is captured talking to the camera responding to questions, screen-grabbed and displayed on the screen, accumulated from the #asktroye hashtag on Twitter. Of the dozen or so questions addressed, two in particular relate overly to Sivan's sexuality. The first was

'#asktroye What was it like having to play a sexually successful straight guy in the Spud films? Also, will there be more of them?'

To this, Sivan responds,

> It was weird. I mean, I have, believe it or not, actually kissed more girls in my life than boys. I think it's never not weird to kiss someone on camera in front of like fifty other people. You do it a bunch of times, you have to stop half way through cos they have to fix like, a light, [background track stops for impact] maybe there was one time where one of you used too much tongue.
>
> (Sivan 2015a)

The second question was '@troyesivan #AskTroye how do you feel about equal marriage rights in the U.S.?!' In the video, Sivan appears visibly excited, getting up from his chair and waving his arms in the air:

> As a young LGBT person I would just like to say thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, to everyone who has ever ever fought for this cause, because my life as an LGBT person who doesn't even live in America, but I just know this is gonna have a knock-on effect, this is a huge huge huge step, from my point of view I just wanna say thank you so so so much. Love wins! [mock waving a flag on camera] This is a pride flag, it's invisible, you can't see it, but it's here! [sic]
>
> (Sivan 2015a)

Notable across both of these examples, then, is the production of content that articulates a sexual citizenship through belonging within a rights-based that reproduces a particular set of normativities (Johnston 2017, pp. 160–161). Here, sexual citizenship is represented through the 'work' of engaging with a particular liberal-humanist framework of political and social change while simultaneously grounding that political engagement through an articulation of the individualised, personal narrative.

Brand collaborations

Collaborations between Influencers and brands/organisations, much like Influencer/Influencer collaborations described later, are instances in which the 'work' of queer microcelebrities is integrated, reflecting the networked approach to new forms of labour in an online setting. Collaboration implies working together, but it also produces mutual outcomes that might include an increased viewership for the Influencer but at the same time an increased attentiveness to a social, political or commercial artefact. In this context, the social networking formation that constitutes identity performances in mutual relationality (Cover 2012b) is extended to the formation in which Influencer identity is an act of *work* that is consciously and creatively produced in mutual relationality with others who also labour for the digital attention afforded by identity as brand.

In an example of brand collaboration content production, in partnership with Paper Magazine and Google, Sivan recounts his first experience at a pride parade years ago. Titled 'My First Pride Parade', the video has accumulated over 544,000 views (Sivan 2017). As he performs a voice-over, Sivan is observed in various locations, such as a darkroom with rainbow light falling on his face, being out in the streets among pride flags or dancing with the pride flag in a photography studio. He summarises his first memory of pride as such:

> There is some sort of like kinship amongst the LGBT people that is actually indescribable to me. Everyone should go to pride, I think. The electricity that's in the air, for me at least that was as life-changing moment. Plus it's really really really fun. Being surrounded by people who are just like you, as crazy as you, maybe even crazier than you, it's like electrifying. I've never felt anything like it. There is a community in the world you who love and support you absolutely and unconditionally.
>
> (Sivan 2017)

The second brand collaboration titled 'How To Have Sex. Safely!' features Sivan promoting Durex condoms while educating his young audience (Sivan 2015b). The video has accumulated over 1,500,000 views and was the second episode of his series 'Awkward conversations with Troye' (Sivan 2015b). The video description carried typical Influencer tropes in which outbound links to sponsors were archived. In this particular advertorial, Sivan placed URLs to Durex Australia's Facebook page and website, with the text 'Get your hands on the goods right here' (Sivan 2015b). In his preamble, Sivan explains his motivations for this advertorial:

> Upon reading your comments in my last video, one of the most common questions was, what seems like quite an obvious one to some of you but to other people it's like, I have no idea… basically it's how do you have safe sex. What does the word safe sex mean? And so I turned to personal knowledge and the internet, and this is what I found.
>
> (Sivan 2015b)

Providing entertainment value and retaining audience attention, Sivan uses both humour (blowing up a condom) and shares safe sex tips while it deflates. In these few minutes, Sivan lectures young people on a variety of safe sex topics, including why they should use condoms, what condoms are made of, how much they cost, how to purchase discreetly avoiding embarrassment and important techniques for their safe use (Sivan 2015b).

In the vein of Influencer commerce, Sivan prompts viewers to leave feedback and promotes his sponsor once more:

> I hope you guys like this video. If you have any questions or comments or anything like that, please use the comments section below. The idea behind

> these videos is they spark conversation and educate you guys while I also educate myself. Again this series is made possible by the people over at Durex. The link to their website is in the description box below. They have a bunch of information about safe sex and condoms and all of that. We survived! You didn't have to talk to your parents about it! You didn't have to talk to your friends about it! Thank me later!
>
> (Sivan 2015b)

The third brand collaboration is also in partnership with Durex, as evidenced by the video description and Sivan's allusions to his work with them. Titled 'Is It Easier To Get AIDS If You're Gay?', and having accumulated over 1,300,000 views, the video takes the format of Sivan clearing up 'misconceptions about HIV and AIDS' by responding to Google auto-complete queries (Sivan 2015c). Through a series of questions, he informs viewers what HIV is and how it harms the body, how the HIV endemic started, misconceptions about how HIV was thought to be 'gay cancer' and what scientists have learned since then, how HIV is transmitted, how condoms used 'properly, consistently, and correctly' can help to prevent HIV, and whether condoms have expiration dates and why (Sivan 2015c). At the end of his mini-lecture, Sivan visibly expresses some discomfort and awkwardness at his own candour, and exaggeratedly takes deep breaths to celebrate his successful tackling of a tricky issue.

Brand collaborations have been carefully selected. One way in which to think about the work of collaborating with a brand is to understand it not only as a form of endorsement (of a production or an idea or a health warning) but as that which actively reinforces the existing brand of the self. Here, labour is directed towards the self-production of status as an Influencer in ways which speak not to the individual but to a recognisable sexual identity – in this case, an LGBTQ male reinforced by an older connectivity with HIV, AIDS and safe-sex education practices.

Influencer collaborations

As part of the relational work activated through mutually beneficial collaboration, Sivan collaborates with several other YouTube Influencers of all genders and sexualities. Although other collaborators differ from for-profit and not-for-profit organisational brands, there is a shared sense of work across YouTubers who undertake specific labour to cross-promote each other. The work, however, is often framed within affective, domestic and intimate performances that on the surface disavow the work setting of cross-promotion and shared creative production. This is particularly the case for work among male YouTube Influencers who are straight, out-queer or ambiguous-queer.

The first Influencer collaboration is with American YouTube Influencer Tyler Oakley, who is also openly gay. In 'Face Painting with #Troyler (ft Tyler Oakley)', with over 460,000 views, Sivan and Oakley attempt the 'Not my arms' YouTube

challenge, in which one person completes basic tasks, such as putting on makeup or eating food, by using the arms of a second person who is sitting behind them (Sivan 2014a). Oakley tells viewers that the challenge is in celebration of 'Valentine's Day', to which Sivan says they will be 'painting each other's face with cute Valentine's Day stuff' (Sivan 2014a). The video shows them setting up in what looks to be Oakley's living room.

While negotiating the baggy t-shirt they are about to share, Sivan slips his arms under Oakley's as the latter giggles hysterically from being ticklish. In the moments in which they paint each other's faces, both men are seen touching each other's faces, pausing for brief cuddles, sharing intense glares, blowing warm breaths down each other's neck, playfully pinching nipples and holding hands. At one point, Oakley tells Sivan, 'Hey your face is so soft' as Sivan looks at him lovingly. Their giggles eventually lead to the duo falling off the chair and outside the frame (Sivan 2014a). As part of the collaboration, Sivan ends the clip by telling viewers,

> We also made a video over on Tyler's channel… I mean, we collab-ed a couple of months ago, so I guess you should also watch that while you're at it, which you can click… here to see, and that is it.
>
> (Sivan 2014a)

A second Influencer collaboration features UK-based Marcus Butler. In '7 Second Challenge with Marcus Butler!', which has accumulated over 4,500,000 views, Sivan and Butler dare each other to 'do shit in 7 seconds', such as answer quizzes or complete dares (Sivan 2014b). Having recently ended a prolific heterosexual relationship with fellow English YouTube Influencer Niomi Smart, Butler is assumed to be straight. Yet in the preamble, Sivan contrasts his smaller-frame and feminine masculinity against Butler's buff and rugged physique with the quip 'and I'm wearing a sports jersey today feeling hella masculine and shit' (Sivan 2014b).

As they partake in the challenge, in the heat of excitement, Butler tells Sivan to 'feel my heart', at which Sivan places his hand over Butler's chest and playfully gropes him over his tight t-shirt (Sivan 2014b). Such intimate body language continues throughout the video across a range of challenges and activities from removing shirts to shared touch during push-ups. Like other Influencer collaborations, the video ends with Sivan encouraging his viewers to subscribe to Butler: 'Seriously though, Marcus is one of my favourite people in the world. And I love his videos, so please please go subscribe' (Sivan 2014b).

The third Influencer collaboration is with South African YouTube Influencer Blessing Xaba; he is one of the few non-white Influencers to appear on Sivan's collaborations. In 'PAINTING WITH BLESSING' viewed over 1,100,000 times, the openly gay Xaba and Sivan set out to make pieces of art for Sivan's bedroom (Sivan 2014c). The video comprises sped-up footage of the men negotiating paint cans and canvas boards, while painting and (at times) dancing. They are also

seen assisting each other with various tasks, interspliced with behind-the-scenes footage of the duo goofing around (Sivan 2014c).

In all three of the Influencer collaboration cases, a performance of identity is produced through a particular kind of community relationality, although in its (often fictionalised) narratives they speak to the kinds of domesticity that are most closely aligned with the privatised nature of sexual citizenship: bedrooms, homes, coupled relationships, intimate friendships. Unlike the earlier brand collaborations that involve a connection with public affairs issues and sexual health advice resources, these latter collaborations produce content that both relates and reinforces the domestic, everydayness of non-heteronormative sexual identities.

It is also in these moments that trust is fostered between Influencers and viewers, and the former becomes an 'agony aunt to a niche market' about the everyday practicalities and philosophical complexities of queer everyday life, from relationships to sexual health (Abidin 2017b, p. 504). This is especially important as the preambles in the vlogs of queer Influencers tend to position a large segment of viewers as queer young people, many of whom they presume to be closeted, struggling or looking for guidance, akin to the framing of the *It Gets Better* legacy of videos. Unlike the *It Gets Better* resources, however, this advisory role, which includes interactive feedback, questions, dialogue and engagement across multiple platforms (Cover 2012b) provides another nuanced, contemporary work-role for the queer Influencer.

Queer microcelebrity publics

Understanding and making sense of queer microcelebrity Influencers and the ways in which their public role can be read as a form of work within a sexual citizenship framework obliges us to return to the history of contemporary digital/visual queer communication. In its Web 2.0 setting, queer vlogging remains governed by the norms of the YouTube 'coming out' video. To investigate the narrative structure of coming out stories, Cover and Prosser (2013) studied memorial accounts and contemporary coming out narratives. They argue that although the genre has changed throughout history, 'core elements and key ideas' in the rhetorical cycle among young queer men include (1) feelings of isolation or loneliness as a young boy, (2) self-perceiving as masculine but as not meeting expectations of hegemonic or hyper-masculinity, (3) having always known one is gay as a child but not necessarily knowing the name for it, (4) a moment of bravery in either a first sexual encounter or in disclosing and confessing a non-heteronormative sexual identity, and (5) typically coming to a sense of belonging to a community or online community or through a coupled relationship (Cover and Prosser 2013, p. 85). However, they argue that coming out narratives for queer persons must not be read as either linear or truncated in the age of the Internet (p. 86).

Morris and Anderson, likewise, argue that the 'Generation' of 'contemporary male youth' is characterised by more 'inclusive masculinities and attitudes'; the use of technological devices to share resources, visible affect and perform

'emotional care work' on social media; and the use of technology to 'consume large amounts of pornography [resulting in] liberal perspectives towards sexual diversity' (2015, p. 1203). At the intersection of a cultural studies approach to coming out narratives (Cover and Prosser 2013) and the sociological approach to male youth sexuality practices in digital spaces (Morris and Anderson 2015), a framework is warranted for discerning a more graduated and extended cycle of coming out narratives for queer Influencers on YouTube who sit at the intersection of queer publics and microcelebrity publics.

The queer Influencer framework of digital content for sexual belonging, as related in the Troye Sivan examples, can be understood to be based on the form of digital coming out narrative, but offering a differentiated and graduated self-reflexivity while simultaneously positioning the coming out story as simultaneously a 'personal' account and a 'work practice' that undertakes labour which both earns for the brand and performs a service for that brand's public. 'Ordinary' coming out does not, in other words, involve the labour of (paid) digital content creation, the latter of which comes to subsume the former in contemporary queer communication. Where Cover and Prosser (2013) uncovered a narrative that commenced with describing feelings of isolation and loneliness in youth, Influencers' accounts of queer microcelebrity articulate isolation in relation to the distinction between school (sometimes as 'real life') and digital spaces (for example, friends on Tumblr and YouTube). Reading this through the lens of 'networked work', school becomes the site as the posited as *prior* to working life, while online activities are *post-school* in the sense that they are self-consciously performed as labour. Rather than being seen as 'typically coming to a sense of belonging to a community or online community or through a coupled relationship' (Cover and Prosser 2013, p. 85), Influencers acknowledge receiving affirmation from their followers and their fellow YouTube Influencers as a general sign of acceptance, and the coming out experience is subsequently enshrined as inspirational by the YouTube community, followers and sometimes the press more generally. In that context, an Influencer's corpus of materials undertake further labour in the sense that it operates as a resource. While coming out is not a singular act but one that is constituted in the persistent need for public repetition, the coming out of the Influencer is one which does a different kind of further labour: the Influencer takes on new public responsibilities as an out queer subject, typically through a more public discourse of one's personal, private and domestic gendered and sexual life as a form of discursive activism, while simultaneously taking on queer-celebratory or queer-targeted brand sponsorship work, promoting mental, social, physical and sexual health and support-seeking.

The processes of self-disclosure which operate on the one hand as a contemporary and digital form of cultural capital among the network of queer Influencers through collective branding, and on the other as economic capital with potential clients and sponsors through an expansion of their marketable personae, present a model of self-disclosure that shifts from the earlier coming out videos. In other words, the 'mediated coming out' of queer Influencers contribute in converting

their 'non-normative sexualities into commercially lucrative labour within the YouTube celebrity economy' (Lovelock 2017, pp. 98–99), wherein their queer identities are a 'potential resource' for a 'successful self-brand' (Lovelock 2017, p. 100). As such, their coming out narratives are more graduated and extended, including extensive padding and preparation to create anticipation, milking the peak of attention cycles to extend their shelf life and cultivate more viable digital estates, and long-tail closure and aftercare to conscientiously wrap up a season of self-branding and transit into the next.

Conclusion

A consideration of queer Influencers who use and engage with YouTube is significant at this time, given their role in responding to concerns over how queer content is moderated. In March 2017, YouTube changed its algorithms to render queer content on its platform 'invisible', by categorising videos with queer content under 'restricted mode' (Hunt 2017). As such, videos with queer content and by queer Influencers no longer appeared on the landing page and did not rank during search queries. A public dialogue with YouTube occurred online across a number of platforms. Prominent queer Influencers on YouTube – including UK-based Rowan Ellis, who is married to her lesbian partner (Shu 2017), and US-based Tyler Oakley, who identifies as gay (Associated Press 2017) – have also used their prolific social media platforms to call out YouTube for its relegation of queer content as non-normative, with positive agreement from the video platform company. Their actions demonstrate the kind of role played by Influencers in queer community activities and the intersection of that work between the personal concern of ensuring their content is available and the community concern of ensuring equal citizenship in digital worlds.

As more closeted queer Influencers come out and more straight Influencers play with queer bait, queer vlog content is snowballing on YouTube. Yet, despite the vast array of genders, sexualities and family structures, the demographic representation of such (quasi-)queer Influencers still appears to be predominantly cisgender, White and (serial) monogamous, resulting in the 'further entrench[ment]' of micro-minorities and groups experiencing intersectional marginality (Peters 2011, p. 207). However, for the most part, a large portion of the pressure exerted upon Influencers comes from clients and sponsors, many of whom are keen and quick to capitalise on moves towards liberalism, greater diversity and thus an expanding consumer market. Queer Influencers on YouTube thus 'reconcil[e] gay and lesbian sexualities with neoliberal-capitalist ideologies of self-sufficiency, entrepreneurialism and individual enterprise, in ways that do not challenge the normativity of heterosexuality or the emotional costs to gay and lesbian life which this entails' (Lovelock 2017, p. 99).

However, is all queer visibility on the internet good, productive or safe visibility? It appears not. A recent article from technology and culture magazine *The Verge* reports that vlogs of transgender YouTubers cataloguing their transition were

data-scraped by an art and research project known as HRT Transgender Dataset. In this instance, 'before and after HRT' faces were collected as 'biometric data' and used to train 'facial recognition software' to read faces. Although these YouTube videos were publicly available, not all individuals were contacted to provide consent to be included in the dataset (Vincent 2017). Transgender vloggers interviewed by *The Verge* reveal that such mechanisms 'may make them a target' in social spaces where they may be closeted (Vincent 2017). As such, queer Influencers who voluntarily practice self-disclosure (Abidin 2013) and communicative intimacies (Abidin 2015) as a parasocial strategy to engage followers ultimately risk public surveillance and vulnerability even while fostering and maintaining safe spaces for their followers to participate in discursive activism. In that context, the model of sexual citizenship labour that queer Influencers embody is not necessarily a model that should be deployed for all queer citizens.

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